

**Statement of Representative Ron Kind**  
**Committee on Education and Labor**  
**“The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our Nation’s**  
**Children”**  
**July 24, 2008**

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the importance of physical and health education for our children.

I would also like to thank Representative Sarbanes for his leadership on the No Child Left Inside Act. As a proud cosponsor of this bill, I look forward to supporting it when it comes before the full House of Representatives for a vote. Finally, I would like to thank Richard Simmons for his tireless advocacy on the importance of fitness and physical activity.

This hearing could not come at a more important time. Rates of childhood obesity have reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Currently 25 million children in America are obese. The childhood obesity rate has tripled since 1980, and continues to rise. It is estimated that by 2010, twenty percent of children in the U.S. will be obese.

The consequences of this epidemic are significant and disheartening. Overweight children and teens are much more likely to develop cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, and various forms of cancer. Because of the increased prevalence of these conditions, today’s children might become the first generation in American history to have shorter lives than their parents.

In addition to the impact obesity has on children’s health and well-being, it also has a staggering effect on our nation’s economy. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, the direct health care costs of obesity were more than \$60 billion in 2002. Half of these costs are paid for by Medicare and Medicaid. We cannot solve our health care crisis without addressing the obesity crisis.

Research suggests that the childhood obesity epidemic is largely due to a decline in regular physical activity and a diet high in empty and fat-laden calories. A lack of regular physical activity not only hurts a child’s health, it can also affect their academic development, as research also shows that healthy children learn more effectively and are higher academic achievers. Simply put, healthy minds need healthy bodies.

With the increase of video games and television usage, schools are one of the few remaining places where children have an environment that encourages physical activity. Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources and competing academic demands and testing, many schools are cutting physical education programs. Between 1991 and 2003, enrollment of high school students in daily physical education classes fell from 42 percent to 28 percent.

That is why I joined with Representatives Zach Wamp and Jay Inslee in sponsoring the Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids Act or FIT Kids Act, H.R. 3257. This bill would help schools provide a comprehensive physical education that would give all children an opportunity – regardless of their background – to learn healthy habits and get moving. This would improve their math and reading test scores, get to the root of the obesity epidemic, and get kids on a healthy path early in life.

Specifically, this bill would provide information to parents and the public by requiring all schools, districts, and states to report on students' physical activity. This information would include the amount of time spent in required physical education in relation to the recommended national standard and the percentage of age-appropriate physical education curriculum and certified physical education teachers.

In addition, the bill promotes physical education and activity in school programs, supports professional development for faculty and staff to promote kids' healthy lifestyles and physical activity, and authorizes a study and pilot program to support effective ways to combat childhood obesity and improve healthy living and physical activity for all children.

Finally, while section 4 of the FIT Kids Act adds physical education to the multiple measures for determining accountability with No Child Left Behind, Mr. Wamp and I only intended this language to be a 'placeholder' indicating our support for physical education to be included in any modified assessment of schools' progress that may be crafted during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We therefore would not object to the removal of this section.

Parents are concerned about the childhood obesity epidemic and believe that schools are a good starting point to address this problem. According to an extensive study done by the Trust for America's Health, less than one-third of adults think that children participate in adequate amounts of physical activity during the school day.

The FIT Kids Act is an important step in making our children more physically active. By teaching kids healthy habits early in life and increasing their physical activity, we will help reduce childhood obesity, improve academic scores, save billions of dollars in health care costs, and save lives.

Thank you again for showing your support for improving the lives of our children through increased physical activity and education. I believe this is one of the most important issues facing us today and I look forward to working with the committee on this issue.